

City of Houston Municipal Art
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Peggy

PUBLIC ART COLLECTION IDENTIFICATION SUMMARY



Number: 0027

Artist: Borglum, John Gutzon (1867 - 1941)

Title: Peggy

Date: 1927

Type: Bronze and White Granite Sculpture

Medium: Sculpture: high relief bronze

Dimensions: Sculpture: 63" x 40" x 20"
Base: 97" x 76" x 40" Plaque: 25 1/4" x 24 1/2" x 3/4"

Foundry/Fabricator: American Art Foundry, NY

Location/Environment: MacGregor Park, near University of Houston, Outdoors

Provenance: Given to the City of Houston as a memorial to Elizabeth Stevens MacGregor by Henry Frederick MacGregor

*Historical Background, Physical Description,
and Restoration Facts on Pages 2 and 3*

Peggy

Historical Background

Artist

In 1927, Gutzon Borglum, then just beginning his heroic presidential portraits on Mt. Rushmore, accepted a commission from Mrs. Elizabeth S. MacGregor for the creation of a bronze sculpture for a small park in Houston.

Borglum was hired and at that time lived and worked in San Antonio, to create a sculptural fountain (his signature can still be seen on the figure's skirt, just beneath the proper left (PL) hand). Borglum attempted to portray Peggy as a young woman, signifying "youth at the fountain of life." *Peggy* is one of two works by Borglum in the state of Texas (the other is *TRAIL DRIVERS* in San Antonio).

Subject

Elizabeth "Peggy" Stevens MacGregor was the daughter of Houstonians O. E. and Mary Stevens. After attending Houston's first public high school, she studied at both the Sam Houston State Teacher's College and the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She had been teaching school for one year when she married Henry Macgregor on December 10, 1885. Mr. MacGregor died on September 3, 1923, before the designs for MacGregor Park and the statue could be completed. Mrs. MacGregor was to complete the planning.

Sculpture

Peggy was originally located in Peggy's Point Park, the small plot of land donated by the MacGregors. It is difficult to imagine now, but when the piece was installed it was surrounded by pastures and dairy cows. As the City of Houston developed around the little park, the sculpture within it became a victim of neglect, disregard, and vandalism.

Sometime around 1974, a decision was made to move *Peggy* to a more secure location. On August 21, 1996, the sculpture was moved a third time to its present location in MacGregor Park.

Years of misuse had taken their toll on the sculpture. *Peggy* was mysteriously missing its right arm and many of the blue tiles that bordered its base. The arm was either broken-off and stolen by vandals or it possibly broke-off during the 1974 move and was subsequently lost. In 1976, Lincoln Borglum, Gutzon's son, made a replacement arm but it was not installed until 1996. The broken and missing tiles were directly related to the 1974 move and were completely removed from the sculpture in 1996.

Peggy

Physical Description

Peggy is a three-quarter relief, smooth-surfaced, cast-bronze sculpture mounted in the recessed area of a white, rough-hewn block of granite. The piece weighs approximately 28 tons and a cast-bronze plaque is mounted on the back. The finished sculpture was a beautifully delicate, three-quarter relief bronze entitled, *Peggy*. At one time, this monument functioned as a fountain (possibly as a drinking fountain). As originally conceived, a stream of water would flow from an outlet at the top of the granite block, down the surface of the stone and over the upturned proper right(PR) hand of the bronze figure. The fountain apparatus has not worked since 1971 and remains disabled today.

The inscription on the bronze plaque reads as follows:

*" MAN IS NOT AT HIS BEST UNTIL HE/ HAS A WIFE AND A HOME AND SO MUCH/
DEPENDS UPON THE WIFE." H.F.M./ IT WAS HIS WISH— AND HERE IN STONE/ AND
BRONZE IS BUILDED A MEMORIAL./ MAY IT GRACE, PERPETUATE AND FULFILL/ THE
CONCEPTION OF/ HENRY FREDERICK MACGREGOR/ THAT IN THIS PARK GIVEN AND
DEDICATED/ BY HIM TO THE PEOPLE OF HOUSTON/ AND NAMED FOR HIS WIFE/
ELIZABETH STEVENS MACGREGOR/ WHOM HE AFFECTIONATELY CALLED "PEGGY,"
SHOULD BE ERRECTED A FOUNTAIN AS A/ TRIBUTE TO THE INSPIRATION OF A
DEVOTED WIFE*

The sculpture is of a young girl, draped in a loose fitting chemise, gazing to her right with her proper right arm extended and palm upward. The artist's signature (*GUTZON BORGLUM*) appears on the left side of her lower garment, as does the foundry mark (*AMER. ART FDRY. NY*) that is placed near the proper left hand. The original proper right arm was lost c. 1974; therefore, the artist's son created a replacement that was installed in 1996.

There is a chalice-shaped indentation beneath the plaque on the back of the granite block which indicates a prior location of a basin. The blue tiles along the lower edge of the granite have been removed.

Restoration/Conservation

This sculpture was fully restored in February 1997.